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AMES, IOWA

SILKWOOD LAWYER CALL FOR NUCLEAR, CIVIL RIGHT REFORM

BY PAIGE ST. JOHN

Frustrated by what he calls government conspiracy, the general counsel for the Karen Silkwood case Monday called for reform of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Civil Rights Act.

Attorney Dan Sheehan, who won a \$10.5 million Supreme Court decision for the Silkwood estate this month, was at Iowa State University trying to gain support for his cause.

Although Sheehan never was able to take the case to court, he said he has proof the conspiracy to prevent Ms. Silkwood from exposing nuclear safety hazards at the Kerr-McGee Corp. extended beyond what the recently released movie shows.

Sheehan said he has documented CIA and FBI involvement in the case, from CIA -kept files on Ms. Silkwood to electronic surveillance of her telephone calls.

Sheehan believes the nuclear energy industry got out of hand in Ms. Silkwood's case "and had the help of the federal government to do so." He said he is fighting to prevent such incidents from happening again.

Sheehan, who now specializes in civil rights and human rights cases, said he wants to take nuclear regulatory control out of the hands of the federal government.

"We're advocating that the control of those facilities be given to state legislatures," Sheehan said, adding the federal government has a "conflict of interest" in nuclear energy that prevents it from safeguarding public health and people like Karen Silkwood.

"We filed our law suit on that basis," Sheehan said, referring to a civil law suit alleging Karen Silkwood's civil rights were violated by the "federal conspiracy" to prevent her from releasing documents proving Kerr-McGee's alleged infractions of nuclear safety rules.

The case was lost, Sheehan said, because the court decided Kerr-McGee, and not the federal government, had conducted surveillance and "conspiracy" against Silkwood.

Sheehan wants civil rights reform to include protect other people from "private conspiracies."

After losing the civil rights suit, Sheehan pressed the \$10.5 million damages suit against Kerr-McGee for allowing Silkwood to be contaminated by plutonium from the plant. He won that fight Jan. 11.

Still, Sheehan has never been able to press his claim that Kerr-McGee deliberately exposed Silkwood to the plutonium. He claims Kerr-McGee exposed Silkwood to the plutonium by lacing food in her apartment with it.

"They never wanted to kill her," he said. "All they were trying to do was 'max' her out, get a lifetime body burden (exposure to radiation) to make her leave, to get her out of their hair."

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He was also never able to bring out evidence proving the existence of documents showing nuclear safety violations at Kerr-McGee. But he said company officials did show an interest in Ms. Silkwood's smashed car.

"They didn't want to kill her," Sheehan repeats. "They just wanted to run her off the road and get those documents back."

Sheehan has been telling his Silkwood story for nine years. Now, with a movie out, some people are listening. But that doesn't mean Sheehan agrees with "The Silkwood Story." He has a number of complaints.

"They were extraordinarily considerate of Kerr-McGee," Sheehan said. "Kerr-McGee made a big campaign of smearing Karen Silkwood's character and Nora Ephron (screenwriter for the movie) took all of that."

Sheehan said the movie makers were afraid of a libel suit from Kerr-McGee and included many errors and falsities about Karen Silkwood's character to appease the company.

"It's like the Solomon tale with the baby," Sheehan said. "In this case, to please both sides, they (the movie writers) cut the baby in half."